

Minutes from the
Louisiana Animal Welfare Commission (LAWC) Meeting
Baton Rouge, LA
June 21, 2008

Members present: Gary Balsamo (exp), Dr. Sam Burke, Hilton Cole (exp), Mary Lee Oliphant (exp), Natalie Robottom (prop), Pinckney Wood (exp).

The Commission discussed the present status of Commission appointments. Only one appointment, that of Dr. Burke, is current. All other appointments have expired. Members stated the importance of the Governor addressing these appointments. Ms. Robottom, Director of the Governor's Office of Community Programs, stated that the Governor's office is very busy working to fill many expired terms on boards and commissions of all types throughout the state. She said that the Governor will address the Commission sometime in the near future.

Hilton Cole discussed some issues facing animal control agencies in the state. Baton Rouge is instituting a program for spaying and neutering the pets of low income families. Hilton also made mention of problems with pit bulls in his parish. The number of this "breed" of dog is out of control, especially in areas of the community that are not well served or do not have access to veterinary care. Mr. Hilton stated that there is also very low compliance with vaccination requirements in these areas.

Mr. Cole also stated that the budget of his animal control agency is increasing by over \$1 million, which exemplifies the progressiveness of his parish. He is also responsible for raising additional funds (\$1.8 million) for a state of the art animal adoption facility in the parish. He mentioned several possible strategies for fund raising.

Mr. Cole, Ms. Mary Lee Oliphant and Mr. Wood discussed a "humane" organization that states on its website that it will conduct inspections of animal control facilities in the state. This agency may have an "agenda" that is not in line with most rational officials, animal control agencies, veterinary practitioners, or humane organizations in the state. For this reason the Commission must advise all animal control organizations, as soon as SB 783 becomes law, that LAWC has been designated by the legislature to be the official "inspecting agency" of animal control facilities in the state. The bill has been passed and is awaiting the Governor's signature. Mr. Cole stated that he is in possession of the current facility standards that the Commission will apply in these animal control audits. Mr. Balsamo stated that the Commission should enlist the support of the Parish Sanitarians in each parish. He suggested that the Louisiana Office of Public Health Sanitarians should conduct the sanitary portion of the audits. Mr. Balsamo stated that these sanitarians are already often called to respond to problems at the facilities, therefore it would follow that, since they are the sanitary experts, they should conduct the sanitary inspections. Mr. Balsamo stated that, in his opinion, this may not significantly increase the Sanitarians' workloads, and will likely only involve a half days work in each parish. In Mr. Balsamo's opinion, the Commission should approach the director of the Environmental Services Section at OPH, as soon as the bill becomes law, to foster

support for these inspections. Mr. Balsamo volunteered to contact the Director at the appropriate time. A subcommittee was designated consisting of Gary Balsamo, Hilton Cole, and Pinckney Wood. This subcommittee will create a template for the animal control shelter audits and report back to the Commission at the next meeting.

Mr. Cole suggested that LAWC send a delegation or communicate in some way with statewide organizations of parish officials, such as the Louisiana Municipal Association or the Louisiana Association of Police Juries. Mr. Cole volunteered to be the LAWC liaison.

Mr. Wood then performed a demonstration of the Louisiana Pet Registry. Mr. Wood explained to the Commission that he is preoccupied with obligations to fix his properties in New Orleans that were severely damaged by the flood. The Registry is, however, ready for testing. Several questions were raised about the data input screen. Mr. Wood agreed to test the input screen and report back to the Commission at a later date. Ms. Robottom commented that the Commission should approach the agencies involved in emergency preparedness and animal evacuation in order to coordinate the Registry with other animal oriented programs in the state. Ms. Robottom also suggested that these organizations may facilitate the Commission's discovery of funding streams that can be applied to the Registry. Ms. Robottom suggested that the Commission involve the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness (GOHSEP). Mr. Wood stated that the timing for the Registry is good because there is a present national movement for identification of animals, especially related to disasters that may require large scale evacuations. Mr. Wood stated that the Registry would promote microchipping but will accept all forms of identification, such as tattoos, rabies and other ID tags, etc. Eventually the Registry would like to have the capability of including photographs of the animals. Mr. Wood reminded the Commission that it is already in law that the Commission should be working to establish this Registry. The system is now on Mr. Wood's personal computer and is not fully functional. The proposed fee to enroll is \$15.00 per animal. Several members questioned the fee and stated that for many people this fee may be excessive. Mr. Wood stated that exceptions could be made for pet owners in need. The general opinion of members was that, before this Registry should be promoted, the testing should be carried out to a level where performance in the public realm would be guaranteed. Mr. Wood also stated that the selling point for this system would be that it is statewide, staffed continuously, and is not limited to rabies tags for identification. He also stated that several modes of identification could be supplied by the owner. Mr. Wood's opinion was that the attraction would be that this system could locate the owners, while other systems could not. He also stated that the system could be used by emergency first-responders, such as fire departments or police, to identify properties that may contain pets. The action step from this discussion was that the Commission should begin a dialogue with the agencies and organizations involved in animal evacuation and stress the fact that the legislature has identified the Commission to be the entity responsible for Registry development.

The Commission also discussed creating position statements on the following issues:

- A position statement stating the scientific basis for acceptance of long-duration rabies vaccines in local animal control ordinances. This position statement should urge continued research by responsible agencies, like the United States Department of Agriculture, to conduct scientifically valid studies to clarify the duration of immunity of these vaccines.
- A position statement supporting intact animal licensing fees by local jurisdictions, but requesting that local jurisdictions specify fees that are not excessive and that are fair to animal breeders.
- A position statement addressing the Louisiana Sheriff's Association and other law enforcement agencies and the judiciary around the state, recommending enforcement of present animal cruelty laws, especially laws against dog-fighting, and creation of local animal cruelty ordinances with appropriate penalties.

Mr. Balsamo volunteered to collect ideas on position statements and asked that the members of the Commission submit their ideas to be included in the position statements. Mr. Balsamo stated that hopefully the position statements would be ready for the next meeting of the LAWC, and that the statements could be addressed, amended, ratified or rejected at that time.

The Commission agreed that the next meeting should take place in September and that the meeting should be carried out using communication equipment available through a cooperating state agency, such as the Department of Health and Hospitals. Mr. Balsamo suggested that the meeting might be conducted over computer with a program utilized by the Office of Public Health. This would permit the members to meet online using their own personal computers.

Meeting was adjourned at 3:00 PM